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### 3 A new dialect for a new village: Evidence for koinéization in East Kent

## 1 Introduction

In 1888, Parish and Shaw lamented, in the introduction to their *Dictionary of the Kentish Dialect and Provincialisms* (p.vii), that:

The true dialect of Kent is now found only in the Eastern portion of the County, and especially in the Weald. (...) The purity of the dialect diminishes in proportion to the proximity to London of the district in which it is spoken. It may be said that the dialectal sewage of the Metropolis finds its way down the river and is deposited on the southern bank of the Thames, as far as the limits of Gravesend-Reach, whence it seems to overflow and saturate the neighbouring district.

More than a century later, the perception that the local dialects of Kent, and of south-eastern England generally, are being polluted by an all-powerful metropolis remains strong, finding modern expression in media commentary on so-called ‘Estuary English’.<sup>1</sup> It is certainly true that the region has been subject to dialect supralocalization (or regional dialect levelling), as a result of which local variants have given way to forms of wider currency, often associated with the capital (see for example Altendorf 1999 & 2003; Ryfa 2003), but as Przedlacka (2002) in particular has demonstrated, contact is giving rise to new kinds of variation rather than to homogeneity.

The focus of this chapter is a highly unusual new contact variety which has developed in the east Kent former mining village of Aylesham, and which appears to have resisted rather than adopted many of the familiar supralocal south-eastern forms. Aylesham dialect differs significantly both from traditional Kentish and from modern south-eastern varieties, and is often perceived locally

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘Estuary English’ (EE), associated initially with Rosewarne (1984; see also Coggle 1993) is controversial among sociolinguists for a number of reasons:

This [Estuary English] is a foolish term which, however, has become widely accepted. [...] It is foolish, I would suggest, because it suggests we are talking about a new variety, which we are not; and because it suggests that it is a variety of English confined to the banks of the Thames Estuary, which it is not.

Trudgill (2001: 10)

to be ‘northern’.<sup>2</sup> As will become clear, its peculiarities owe much to the heterogeneous mix of settlers who first came to the village in the 1920s and early 1930s, bringing a disparate range of alien dialects with them to the south-east. The formation of a divergent variety in an area associated with a high degree of leveling raises interesting questions. To what extent is the new variety focused, i.e. uniform within the community, and what are its distinctive features? More importantly, how were these features selected, and was there an ‘inevitability’ about the dialect contact outcome, as Trudgill (2004) has argued for colonial settings such as New Zealand? These questions will be addressed below below using data from a pilot study,<sup>3</sup> but we need first to understand the circumstances in which Aylesham was born, and the kind of community into which it evolved.

## 2 A new town for miners

While geologists had suspected the existence of a coal seam beneath east Kent as early as the 1840s, coal was not discovered there until 1890, and its exploitation proved difficult as it was buried deep underground; test sites bored by the Kent Coalfield Syndicate were subject to frequent flooding and initially yielded little. Investors nonetheless persevered with exploration and Snowdown Colliery, which opened in 1907, yielded the first deep-mined commercial coal from the county in 1912. By the 1920s, the potential of the coal industry saw east Kent earmarked for major industrial expansion. In a burst of optimism which with hindsight appears touchingly naïve, Ritchie (1922: 293–94) talks of “room for the establishment of some 20 collieries” offering “employment to about 60,000 colliery workers”, and concludes, somewhat lyrically: “Already the stars lately appearing in the Kent Coal firmament are assuming the dignity of suns”. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced plans in Canterbury for 18 new Kent pits on 27th July 1926.

Development on such a scale presented huge challenges. Sir Patrick Abercrombie’s Regional Planning Committee foresaw a massive expansion of east Kent’s population, from around 23,000 in the 1920s (Hilton 1986: 42) to some

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<sup>2</sup> This observation was frequently offered by informants. In the words of one: ‘Plastic northerners: that’s what they call us, you know.’

<sup>3</sup> My thanks to Kay and Philip Sutcliffe, and to all the other Ayleshamers who welcomed me to their village and helped me complete the pilot study. Thanks also to Amalia Arvaniti, Megan Jones, and Jessica Geary for assistance with data analysis and verification of phonetic judgements. Finally, thanks are due to Peter Trudgill, Paul Kerswill and two anonymous reviewers, who offered perceptive and extremely helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

300,000 by 1955/1965, for which the region was entirely unprepared. Regional infrastructure, identified in Abercrombie's (1927) report as primarily serving the coastal industries, was inadequate, having neither the road nor the railway networks needed to move the extracted coal. A more immediate problem for the coalfield companies, however, was the lack of a suitably skilled local labour force in an area known for fruit-picking rather than for heavy industry. Miners therefore had to be recruited from other UK coalfields, and came in large numbers in the 1920s from South Wales, Scotland, north-east England, Somerset, the east midlands, south Yorkshire, and Lancashire to a region which lacked the housing stock and basic amenities to meet their needs. On arrival, the newcomers found a less than warm welcome. The Dover Museum website<sup>4</sup> recalls how migrants were viewed with suspicion, with local landlords in Dover, Deal or Folkestone openly refusing to let to what they called 'those dirty miners':

The arrival of all these "rough and ready foreigners" initially horrified the locals, especially as all the collieries were located in rural areas near sleepy villages and hamlets. Towns like Deal, where many Betteshanger miners lived, were shocked to find huge gangs of blackened labourers in hobnailed boots marching to and from work through the streets. Signs saying 'No Miners' soon appeared in shops and pubs. To try and reduce the hostility, Kent pits were amongst the first to have pit head baths so miners could go home clean.

Even for those who could overcome local hostility and a chronic shortage of accommodation, working conditions were extremely difficult. The fierce heat of the Snowdown pit, for example, in which miners often had to work naked and drink around 24 pints of water per shift to prevent dehydration, earned it locally the nickname of 'Dante's Inferno'. Many men failed to settle and returned home (see Goffee 1978: 265), sometimes without even completing a full shift. Retaining a workforce in such circumstances was therefore a challenge, which would necessitate major changes to the landscape of the Garden of England. Unsurprisingly, these would not be universally welcomed.

Sir Patrick Abercrombie's proposal, set out in a 1927 document entitled *The Development of East Kent*, was the creation of 8 new towns to serve the coal industry: the first of these, Aylesham, was already under construction by the time the report was published. These would offer migrant workers low-cost new housing, free coal, a full range of local amenities and a welfare fund to support collierymen and their families, increasing the incentives for miners to move to 'The Sunshine Corner', where wages were already higher than in other coalfields.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dovermuseum.co.uk/Exhibitions/Coal-Mining-in-Kent/History/Miners.aspx>, accessed 11 November 2015. See also Hollingsworth (2010: 4).

Abercrombie's 1927 report offers important clues to the kind of place Aylesham would become. His vision was of a purpose-built town for miners' families, adjacent to Snowdown Colliery and providing homes for up to 15,000 people (p.441). But it was not just the needs of the new industrial workforce which Abercrombie needed to address: he also had to calm local fears that large-scale construction would ruin a quiet, unspoilt corner of rural east Kent. The Introduction and Survey sections of Abercrombie's report make much of the "charm" of the region and the need to preserve its character, acknowledging from the outset the threat posed by the new industry (1927: 431), which was "suddenly changing its character to fit it for a function that has been so far reserved for places in the North and the Midlands". Referring to the Aylesham site under construction, Abercrombie concedes (1927: 439): "Anyone, indeed, visiting the site at the moment would, unless possessed of the prophetic eye, consider this an extreme act of rural desecration." One senses already, however, that the Kent countryside is not the only concern:

The apex of the triangle is filled with the old beech wood, and on either hand, advancing somewhat down on either side, are newer larch plantations. The town is thus enclosed and sheltered from the fierce winds that beat about this jut of England: it will not be permitted to stray beyond its green walls.

The report makes no direct reference to the cultural impact of large-scale migration, but is nonetheless at pains to point out that a town designed for miners originating from distant parts of the UK would be set well apart from neighbouring Kentish villages. The isolation which characterizes Aylesham even today is thus an integral and permanent design feature of the village, rather than a historical accident. After the warm words ("sheltered from the fierce winds"), a rather firmer clause ("will not be permitted to stray") seems designed to reassure the local population that the new development will minimize, rather than increase, contact with the newcomers.

Aylesham and Snowdown (which consists of just two streets near the colliery, and was built to house colliery foremen) remain separated from their neighbours by a 'buffer zone' of woods and fields. The village has never been served by a main road, and as Park observes (1999: 334): "People who were not from Aylesham had no reason to go there; it was not on the way to anywhere. It still isn't."

The optimistic projections of the 1920s would be dashed by the depression of the 1930s, and the harsh economics of Kent coal. In comparison with richer, more accessible seams such as Nottinghamshire, the Kent coalfield proved unyielding and Snowdown was one of only four Kent mines which ultimately proved viable, alongside Tilmanstone (opened in 1906), Chislet (1914) and Betteshanger (1924); Chislet was the first to close in 1969. Abercrombie's vision of 8 new towns was never realized: Aylesham became, in Park's words (1999: 2), "an overgrown

village” with a population of 4,000–5,000 rather than a small town, while smaller villages at Mill Hill near Deal and at Betteshanger, at Elvington and at Hersden, near Canterbury, provided homes for miners and their families at the other three collieries.

Construction in the 1980s of the ‘Old Park’ housing estate to the north of Aylesham (known locally as ‘Brookside’, after the Channel Four soap opera) brought new residents to the village.<sup>5</sup> More generally, though, the village has seen decline in the aftermath of the 1984–85 miners’ strike, in which it played a prominent role. Snowdown Colliery closed in 1987; the village’s secondary school followed soon after in 1991, forcing young Ayleshamers to continue their education after primary school in Dover or Canterbury. While some jobs have been provided by Aylesham industrial estate to the east of the village, and Aylesham Business Park, a £2m project offering offices and workshops to start-up businesses, the local employment picture remains bleak. Dover District Council lists Aylesham among its eight most deprived wards, and the village is among the top 20% most deprived LSOAs (lower super output areas) in the country,<sup>6</sup> as is reflected in the high numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals using the standard 6-year measure in Aylesham’s two primary schools (Aylesham Primary 47%; St. Josephs 53.8%).<sup>7</sup> The village population remains almost exclusively white British: the most recent Ofsted report for Aylesham Primary school reports no pupils with a first language other than English; the corresponding figure for St. Joseph’s Catholic Primary School is just 1.4%. With the loss of the village’s economic mainstay, shops have struggled to stay open and Aylesham’s social clubs, together with its one public house, have all closed down in the last fifteen years.

Some recent new developments, however, have been built with future expansion in mind. A new medical centre with dispensing chemist opened on the central market square in 2009, and Aylesham Welfare Leisure Centre opened alongside the village’s football and rugby pitches in 2012, offering gym and other fitness activities, together with a small bar and gallery area for spectators. Plans for further residential expansion were finally approved in 2012, allowing Hilreed and Ward Homes to build 1200 new dwellings to the north of the existing Old Park (‘Brookside’) estate. Views among Ayleshamers are mixed: some welcome any new investment, while others question whether local amenities will cope

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5 These newer residents, who have no mining connections, are sometimes referred to as ‘strangers’ by longer established Ayleshamers.

6 <http://moderngov.dover.gov.uk/documents/s9157/K%20-%20Deprivation%20and%20Poverty%20v6.pdf> accessed 22.1.2016.

7 Data from <http://www.education.gov.uk/cgi-bin/schools/performance/> accessed 22.1.2016.

with a significant increase in population. For traditional Ayleshamers in particular, though, there is a fear that the community ethos of the village, already undermined, will be lost completely. Certainly, the developers' bright vision of an 'Aylesham Garden Village', as set out on their website, downplays the village's existing character and airbrushes away entirely the historical connection with coal, to which Aylesham owes its very existence:

The village continues to thrive since its early plans were drawn up by renowned Architect Sir Patrick Abercrombie, and the new development by Hillreed Homes and Barratt Homes offers the community further growth in the spirit of opportunity that lies at the heart of its creation. Aylesham is a particularly interesting place with a distinct and unique character of simple formal architecture and spaces, more akin to that of an urban suburb although set deep in the Kentish countryside.

Housing proposed will be predominantly family-sized 2 and 3 bedroom homes ideal for younger working families. There will also be a range of other sizes including apartments and houses of 4 and 5 bedrooms.<sup>8</sup>

There is more than a hint of estate agent's hyperbole in the 'urban suburb' described above, which few traditional Ayleshamers would recognize. Nine decades after the village was born, and a generation after pit closures, Aylesham's 'dirty miners' must still, it seems, be hidden from view.

### 3 Proletarian traditionalism

In the previous section it was argued that a constellation of socio-economic, geographical and cultural factors came together to isolate Aylesham from neighbouring villages. But what kind of community emerged from this isolation? A helpful model in this regard is provided by Lockwood (1975 [1966]), who argued that different occupational groups can be distinguished in terms of how they view their relationship with work, their employers, and the outside world. He contrasted two types of working-class traditionalist ('deferential' and 'proletarian') with what he saw at the time as a newer breed of 'privatized' worker, who views work largely in terms of a cash nexus (as exemplified by the Luton car workers studied by Goldthorpe et al 1968). Where deferential traditionalists see a social hierarchy which is broadly just, those of the proletarian variety view society in terms of a conflict between 'them' and 'us'. Mining communities have long been of interest

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ayleshamgardenvillage.co.uk/index.php/the-vision/>:accessed 22.1.2016.

to sociologists (see for example Dennis, Henriquez & Slaughter 1956; Reid 1985), as archetypal exemplars of proletarian traditionalism, and Lockwood's conception of the proletarian community (1975: 198–99) certainly finds strong echoes in Aylesham:

Workmates are normally leisure-time companions and not infrequently kinsmen. The existence of such closely-knit cliques of friends, workmates, neighbours and relatives is the hallmark of the traditional working class community. The values expressed through these social networks emphasize mutual aid in everyday life and the obligation to join in the gregarious pattern of leisure, which itself demands the expenditure of time, money and energy in a public and present-orientated conviviality and eschews individuals' striving 'to be different'. As a form of social life, this communal sociability has a ritualistic quality, creating a high moral density and reinforcing sentiments of belongingness to a work-dominated collectivity. The isolated and endogamous nature of the community, its predominantly one-class population, and low rates of geographical and social mobility all tend to make it an inward-looking society and to accentuate the sense of cohesion that springs from shared work experiences.

In many respects, what Lockwood is describing are dense and multiplex social networks: the first sentence almost amounts to a definition of network multiplexity in Milroy's (1987) terms, while reference to "the *obligation* to join in" reflects the capacity of such networks to act as a norm enforcement mechanism. Network density and multiplexity certainly characterize working and social life in Aylesham: informants talked of extended families in the village over three or more generations, of fathers, sons and brothers all working at Snowdown, and of leisure time revolving around the village's sports or social clubs. A "tightly knit network of kinship" is highlighted in a *Kentish Gazette* article<sup>9</sup> celebrating the 50th anniversary of the village, and Goffee's (1978: 43) own informants would joke that they were "related to half the population of Aylesham". Lockwood's emphasis on mutual aid and solidarity, and the collective sanction against individualism, was also very much in evidence. Goffee (1978: 530) cites the "strong pressures to conform" as a reason for some to leave the village and the coal industry altogether: a gentle reminder that the solidarity ethos and community spirit, which many Ayleshamers recall with pride, were sometimes at odds with the pioneering individualism of those who had travelled far to seek a new life. Park (1999: 321) stresses the pervasive influence of the the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) locally in a wide range of matters, including housing policy: "Branch leaders had their authority extended beyond the limits of the pit gates .... the union pervaded many aspects of a miner's life".

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<sup>9</sup> *Kentish Gazette*, 27th May 1977.



At times of crisis, solidarity within the proletarian community is not merely encouraged, but actively enforced. The miners' strike of 1984–85, which still has iconic status in Aylesham, offers a particularly stark illustration of the proletarian 'them and us' ideology. Kent mineworkers were renowned for their militancy throughout the bitter year-long dispute: fully 93% of the workforce were still refusing to work when the strike formally ended after a vote to return work – opposed only by Kent and Yorkshire NUM branches – in March 1985. A generation after pit closures, the village designed by Abercrombie in the shape of a pit wheel is still, for older Ayleshamers at least, defined by coal and industrial action. A statue of a miner and his children stands outside the former secondary school, and a pit wheel memorial stands in the centre of the market square as a lasting reminder of the village's industrial past. The annual Kent Miners' Festival around August Bank Holiday continues to be well supported by villagers, and memorabilia from the 1984–85 strike on display at the Heritage Centre leave the visitor in no doubt where local loyalties, at least among those old enough to remember Aylesham as a working pit village, still lie.

This close-knit, solidaristic community did not, however, emerge overnight. A number of sources attest to the very fluid and rather tribal nature of Aylesham in its early years, as different migrant groups took time to adapt to their new circumstances. According to Goffee (1978: 231), the very earliest boring and sinking work in the first two decades of the last century was largely undertaken by itinerant contract gangs, often from Ireland, who generally did not remain in Kent once their contracts were completed. Once coal measures had been opened, however, experienced miners needed to be recruited from elsewhere to work underground. Surface work for less skilled workers, often recruited locally, was available but less lucrative, and as a percentage of the coalfield workforce the numbers involved in ancillary tasks fell dramatically between 1924 and 1930 as coal output increased. For the first decade of Aylesham's existence, therefore, it is clear that the population of the village was very largely made up of migrants, whose linguistic diversity attracts frequent comment in oral histories. Goffee (1978: 229) quotes Sam Lawrence, a miner from Hebburn, County Durham, who arrived in 1932, aged 30: "You had people from Wales, people from Scotland, people from Ireland, Durham, Yorkshire, Cumberland, even down in the West Country .... so cosmopolitan. No matter where you went there was somebody of a different language."

It is difficult to determine the precise ethnic mix of the new village during a first decade (1927–37) which largely overlaps with the major expansion of the Kent coal industry. The best estimates available for this period are provided by Thomas (1934), who uses information from unemployment books exchanged at Dover and Canterbury Employment Exchanges for the period 1920–36 to determine the

**Table 1:** Origin of Migrants, Kent coalfield  
1920–1936 (Source: Thomas 1934 and 1937).

	1932	1936
South West	8 %	4 %
Midlands	18 %	13 %
North East	34 %	40 %
North West	8 %	8 %
Scotland	6 %	8 %
Wales	25 %	26 %
Northern Ireland	–	–

origins of 5134 miners in the Kent coalfield between 1920 and 1932, and updates these figures in Thomas (1937) using subsequent data to 1936. His findings are summarized in Table 1 above.

Thomas' estimates appear to be consistent with available information on the mining companies' recruitment drives (notably in south Wales in 1927, the Midlands in 1928, and all areas except Durham in 1929: see Johnson 1972: 236), and indeed the coalfields where unemployment was high during this period. But as Goffee points out, there is little information on the 2400 men already employed in the Kent coalfield by 1920, nor about the miners who came and left the coalfield after that date. Thomas' figures include only what he terms 'foreign' unemployment books (i.e. those from another administrative area), and consequently exclude workers from the 'home' London and the South-East region, though there is good reason to believe these workers were relatively few in number. His data are based on the eight administrative areas recognized by the Ministry of Labour at the time, which had very wide boundaries: Midlands includes Nottinghamshire and most of Derbyshire, while the North-East includes County Durham and Northumberland, but also Yorkshire and most of Lincolnshire.<sup>10</sup> There are other reasons for treating these figures with some caution. It is quite likely, for example, that the ethnic mix at each pit varied: the owners of each colliery tended to recruit most strongly in areas where they had existing connections, and Dorman Long, the company which owned Snowdown and Hersden, were known to have had strong links to South Wales. Branson and Heinemann (1971; quoted by Goffee 1978: 282: fn 7) talk of there being a 'Scottish' and a 'Welsh' pit, which Goffee concludes are likely to have been Betteshanger and Chislet respectively.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas (1937: 334) offers no breakdown by county, noting only that "men from Northumberland, Durham and Yorkshire are the prominent section in the Hendon-Watford area and the Kent Coalfield".

Goffee (1978: 234) also quotes Arthur Fox, a Tilmanstone miner who noted that the pit was mostly worked by Staffordshire men in 1913 when he first arrived, but that when he returned for a second spell there in 1921 the labour force was “practically all Somerset men”. Such evidence is, of course, anecdotal, and a tendency among migrant workers to overestimate the proportion of miners from their own region, with whom, in the early days at least, they would have tended to remain close, should not be discounted.

A very high level instability complicates the problem of determining the initial settler mix both during the initial period of expansion (1927–35), and later during the war years, when fear of an imminent invasion by German forces based in France prompted some miners’ families to return to their ‘home’ coalfields (Goffee 1978: 234).<sup>11</sup> Some men, burdened by debts incurred during the General Strike of 1926, which had left them blacklisted by local employers, came without papers or gave false names. Many arrived in poor health and, unable to withstand the harsh working conditions of the Kent coalfield, returned home. Harkell (1978: 99) cites a miner from St. Helens who arrived in 1930:

Men had been so long unemployed Snowdown was killing them off. They were coming and going, coming and going in thousands. There was fellas on the road for debt – they’d had the 26 strike, grocery debts, rent and different debts, and there was fellas on the run from kids and wives. Some of the real best came down ‘ere and some of the worst, but a lot of them couldn’t face it.

For those who stayed, there was the realistic hope of a modern home with a front and back garden in Aylesham, and incomes significantly higher than they could earn at home. Many others, however, struggled to settle for reasons other than the harsh working conditions. Harkell (1978) stresses the role of women in prompting the decision to return. While men moved for work and found others at the coalface who shared their values, housewives disproportionately bore the brunt of hostility from an indigenous population resentful of better paid<sup>12</sup> newcomers whose backgrounds and cultures were very different. Even within Aylesham, opportunities to socialize in the early years were restricted by internal divisions between the different ethnic groups.

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<sup>11</sup> An additional complicating factor during the Second World War was an influx of so-called ‘Bevin Boys’ – men conscripted from various parts of the country to work in the mines rather than serve on the front line (for details see Harrison 1954). The scheme continued until 1946 but few of these workers remained in the coal industry after this date.

<sup>12</sup> According to Hughes (1934: 185), a weekly wage of around £3 at the coalface in the late 1920s was nearly double that typically earned in agriculture (32s).

Aylesham's population for the first five years at least is therefore characterized by very high turnover, as miners leaving Kent for their home region were replaced by incomers seeking opportunities in a new coalfield likened by more than one commentator to the Klondike. Goffee (1978: 265) cites evidence from 1927 union membership statistics, which suggest that of all the members registered on 1st January 1927, only 43% remained members at the end of that year; conversely 69% of members at 31st December 1927 had joined during that same year. 700 people are known to have come and gone from Aylesham from 1929–31; a local headmaster is quoted as saying that 300 families left Aylesham in 1928 and 1929. The lack of a stable population did not make for community cohesion, and evidence suggests that there were stark divisions along ethnic lines. Harkell (1978: 101) quotes an Aylesham miner: "For the first three or four years the Welsh stuck to the Welsh, the Derbyshire stuck to the Derbyshire and the Geordies stuck to the Geordies. If they went into a pub they weren't friendly – there was more trouble than anything else."

These internal divisions were exacerbated by the iniquities of the 'Butty System', in which payment by performance was sub-contracted by the colliery owners to team leaders, who determined how much the men under their control were paid (see Park 1999: 82). The 'trouble' to which Harkell alludes often involved 'Buttymen', who were perceived to favour those from their home coalfield, some of whom would have been friends who had made the journey to Kent at the same time. Welsh miners appear to have borne considerable resentment from other miners' groups because, as a result of a longer and more severe depression in Wales, men had been out of work for longer and were seen to be more ready to undercut others. There is some early evidence of *de facto* segregation by housing within Aylesham, with Scots migrants congregating particularly in one part of the village. A sense of community only began to emerge as members of different groups intermarried and had children:

About the time I came here, they could never agree, the people – the Welsh, the Geordies and the Scotch. They were always fighting y'know (laughs). But of course, they've had the children and they've married different – through and through – and it's all different y'know. Oh aye, they used to be terrible here.

Alf Jones, quoted by Goffee (1978: 341)

This begs the question of when Aylesham started to become a stable and cohesive community. This is important because linguistic focusing implies social stability and is most likely to be found in groups which, in Downes' words, "have a strong sense of their own identity, a consensus in values and beliefs, and also in relation to the norms or rules which govern their practices" (1984: 216; quoted by Kerswill & Williams 2000: 101). The consensus among commentators is that

a stable community only begins to establish itself in Aylesham after the Second World War. Job (1966: 27) notes that “there was a constant migration backwards and forwards and it was only after the Second World War that the labour force became more or less stabilised”; Goffee (1978: 424) is reluctant to specify dates but endorses Job’s view that the community lacked stability at least until 1945, while Park (1999: 372) talks of a “growing cohesiveness” in the community by the 1950s, which he attributes to intermarriage and the birth of second- and third-generation children.

The cohesiveness which Park identifies was boosted by a number of factors. Firstly, the much resented ‘butty’ system, which had fostered individualism and the formation of coalface cliques (see Goffee 1978: 337–53), was abolished by 1939 in the face of opposition from the men themselves, whose bargaining position strengthened as the pace of migration to Kent slowed towards the end of the 1930s. While some of the families who had left Aylesham during the war were tempted back after 1945 by the prospect of higher wages, the immediate post-war period saw relatively low levels of in- and out-migration: a 1968 survey quoted by Goffee (1978: 425) suggested that 77% of the population had been resident in the village since before 1950, and only 11% had arrived in the period 1951–1960; electoral roll evidence, in stark contrast to the 1920s and 1930s, also confirms a high degree of stability in the Aylesham population. A sense of occupational continuity is also evident: employment at Snowdown rose gradually to its peak of around 2000 by 1957, as sons followed their fathers into the industry (all but one of the male pilot study informants are sons of miners). 1957 marked the start of a long-term decline for coal both locally and nationally, but Goffee maintains that the values of ‘mutual help and collective action’ which typify the proletarian community remained undiminished. By the early 1970s, which saw two major strikes in 1972 and 1974, the coal industry directly employed less than half of the Aylesham workforce, but solidarity with the miners in the form of voluntary contributions to benevolent funds, or gifts from workers at the local meat factory and the like, remained buoyant. In many cases, this was because Ayleshamers had family members involved in coalmining, had been involved in it themselves or, in some cases, had left the industry but were looking to go back if wages and/or conditions improved (Goffee 1978: 459–61).

The development of the Aylesham community may be summarized in the following way. The two streets which constituted Aylesham in 1927 quickly grew to some 600 homes, but not the fully-fledged new town of Abercrombie’s vision. The years to 1936 saw rapid growth as the coal industry expanded, coupled with a high turnover of the local population as families came to and left Kent. Contraction followed until 1946 (Goffee puts the number of miners coming to Kent between 1935 and 1939 at just 1136), followed by recovery in the

immediate post-war years. Aylesham's ethnic mix is difficult to establish precisely, but evidence suggests that it was highly heterogeneous, with indigenous Kentish families representing a small minority; the largest groups represented almost certainly came from the 'North East' as very broadly defined by the Ministry of Labour and from south Wales. Until the end of the Second World War at least, there is little evidence of a settled community: indeed Aylesham in the 1920s and early 1930s appears a rather clannish place in many respects. By contrast, argues Goffee (1978: 424) "the post-war forties and fifties were years of stability, prosperity and consolidation", from which a sense of community emerges. To quote Goffee (1978: 427) again: "As the population at Aylesham stabilised the village began to acquire a distinct social and political identity and social relationships – which were compared, during the inter-war period, to the normless and unordered settlements of the American 'Wild West' – were gradually institutionalised."

It was into this stable, proletarian community that the pilot study informants were mostly born and raised. They grew up in a migrant settlement without an established local speech norm to target, and it is from their attempts to navigate the extreme variability they encountered that a new norm emerged.

## 4 The Aylesham Pilot study

For the pilot study, a judgement sample of 12 informants (7 male, 5 female) was selected. Aged between 45 and 82, all but one<sup>13</sup> were either born and raised in Aylesham or came to the village before the age of 5, and were educated there. All would self-identify as 'traditional Ayleshamers', both in that they can trace an association with the village back to its early settlement years, and in that they have a strong mining connection: all the men have spent a significant part of their working lives at Snowdown, while the women are or were married to former miners, all but one of whom (Bill) had followed his father into the industry.

Several informants were actively involved in community activities: these included serving on the parish council, volunteering at the Aylesham Heritage Centre, and helping out with charity events at the village hall. Table 2 below lists the informants with their year of birth and age when interviewed, the Aylesham generation to which they belong (taking the original migrants as the

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<sup>13</sup> The exception, Elspeth, came to Aylesham in 1934, aged 10. Names of all informants have been changed to preserve anonymity.

**Table 2:** Aylesham Pilot Study Informants.

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Aylesham Generation	Heritage
1	Alan	M	72 (b.1943)	2nd	F. & m. south Wales; arr. 1927
2	John	M	74 (b.1940)	2nd	F. & m. south Wales; arr. 1927
3	Bob	M	70 (b. 1946)	2nd	F. & m. Yorkshire; arr. 1945
4	David	M	69 (b. 1947)	3rd	F. south Wales; m. County Durham
5	Ernie	M	74 (b. 1940)	2nd	F. & m. Yorkshire; arr. 1934
6	Paul	M	76 (b. 1939)	2nd	F. & m. south Wales
7	Bill	M	80 (b. 1934)	2nd	Kentish (both parents)
8	Mavis	F	82 (b. 1932)	2nd	F. & m. south Wales; arr. 1937.
9	Jane	F	45 (b.1969)	3rd	Grandparents from County Durham
10	Paula	F	57 (b. 1957)	3rd	Grandparents from south Wales
11	Sheila	F	65 (b. 1949)	2nd	F. south Wales; m. Derbyshire
12	Elsbeth	F	82 (b. 1923)	2nd	F. & m. Derbyshire; arr. 1934

Key: arr. arrived; b. born; f. father; m. mother

first generation),<sup>14</sup> and information about their heritage (the place of origin of the parents or grandparents who first came to Aylesham).

Informants were interviewed, either individually or in pairs, at a place of their choosing (generally their home or the Heritage Centre): interviews lasted about 40–50 minutes and included a reading test which was taken after about 10 mins and a word list which informants were asked to read at the end. For the interview, a maximum of 25 tokens for any single variable was counted, with samples taken from before and after the reading test.

## 5 Features of Aylesham English

While the main focus below is on Aylesham phonology, some discussion of local lexical and grammatical forms observed in the pilot study, or which attract comment elsewhere, is also appropriate here.

<sup>14</sup> This was not always straightforward. Sheila's father, for example, followed his own father to Aylesham from south Wales, but as she represents the first generation of her family to be born and/or raised in Kent, she has been included in the second generation. Bill, unusually, comes from a Kentish rather than a migrant family but was brought to Aylesham by his parents: he therefore has also been included in the second generation.

## 5.1 Consonants

The consonant system of Aylesham English corresponds to that of RP. Aylesham speech is non-rhotic, with /r/ realized consistently as a post-alveolar approximant [ɹ] in onset position by all pilot study speakers; only the youngest informant, Jane, shows some use of the labio-dental approximant [v]. /l/ follows the allophonic distribution of RP, with ‘clear’ [l] in onset and ‘dark’ [ɫ] in coda position. It is noteworthy in a south-eastern variety, however, that L vocalization is largely absent: only Jane vocalizes to any significant extent, almost always in preconsonantal position, while all other informants maintain [ɫ] in coda position consistently: use of [ʊ]-like variants even in preconsonantal position is rare. Another supralocal south-eastern feature, TH fronting, is also absent in Aylesham: all informants consistently maintain /θ/ and /ð/ in all positions. H dropping, however, was common: ignoring unstressed grammatical words and taking only full lexical items into account, all informants show /h/ deletion to some degree, and four of the older male informants (Bob, David, Ernie and Bill) delete most of the time (including in the reading test in Bill’s case): only Mavis shows categorical non-deletion. T glottalling is not uncommon, particularly for the younger female informants Jane and Paula: all informants except Paul use [t̚] and [ʔ] variants of /t/, but glottalling in intervocalic position, particularly among the male informants, is relatively rare.

## 5.2 Vowels

### BATH-TRAP and FOOT-STRUT

Given the widespread perception that Aylesham dialect is northern rather than southern, which was noted above, it seems appropriate to begin with what Foulkes and Docherty (1999: 66), among others (see also Wells 1982: 351), identify as the principal north-south shibboleths within England:

It is widely recognized that vowels carry the bulk of responsibility for differentiating English accents from one another (Wells 1982: 178). The vowels with perhaps the greatest sociolinguistic significance in England are STRUT and BATH. The main alternants, [ʊ] *versus* [ʌ] and [a] *versus* [ɑ:] respectively, divide the linguistic north and south.

The vowels are differentiated as a result of splits which happened in southern England but not the north (for summary see Trudgill 2004: 59–61 and 133–36), leaving the south with an additional phoneme /ʌ/ for the STRUT lexical set, and a different distribution for the /a/ – /ɑ:/ opposition. For the BATH set, Aylesham usage follows the northern English model: with the exception of Mavis, who has



southern English /ɑ:/, all informants show categorical use of short front /a/. For the START and PALM sets as defined by Wells (1982: 142–44 and 157–59), in the latter of which Wells includes *father* (consistently [fɑ:ðə] in the word list), informants have mostly back /ɑ:/, though Bob generally has a long front [a:] for START. Anecdotal evidence suggests that unsplit BATH-TRAP remains strong even among young Ayleshamers, and that Ayleshamers identify this as the most distinctive feature of their speech.<sup>15</sup>

A more complex picture emerges for FOOT-STRUT. The origin of the FOOT-STRUT split in southern British English, according to Wells, is the unrounding of the lax /ʊ/ phoneme derived from Old English short /u/ during the Early Modern English period, probably from around the mid sixteenth Century (see also Barber et al 2009: 205).<sup>16</sup> Unrounding generally occurred in all environments except after labials or before /l/, /ʃ/, or /tʃ/, giving allophones [ʊ] and [ʌ] which became independent phonemes during the seventeenth Century, and have a complex modern distribution: *gush*, *mud*, *fun*, and *such* for example have /ʌ/ instead of the expected /ʊ/ while *sugar* has /ʊ/ rather than /ʌ/. Further complications arise from shortening of Middle English /o:/: where this occurred before the split words with this vowel joined the /u/ lexical set and generally now have /ʌ/ (e.g. *blood*, *love*) in southern English, while in words where shortening occurred later (e.g. *good*, *stood*, *foot*), /ʊ/ is retained. Wells (1982: 199) sets out the stages of development for five relevant lexical sets, firstly for accents with the FOOT-STRUT split (see Table 3 below) and secondly for those without it (Table 4).

The items in Wells' MOOD subset have /u:/ as in southern English varieties generally (e.g. *brood* from the word list); there is however variation between [ɪu:m] and [ɪʊm] for *room*). Alan has a fronted allophone [y:] or [yə] before syllable-final /l/, e.g. in *school*, *fool*. [ɒ] is also used by four informants in a small number of items including *nothing*, *one*, *worry*, *money* and *other*.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> One pilot study informant cited this variable as a reason for having been “terrified” of being asked to read aloud at her grammar school in Canterbury; another Aylesham woman in her twenties told me: “When we go to secondary school in Canterbury or Dover they all take the piss out of us because we say *path* [pəθ] and *grass* [gras]”. Given the social salience of this variable locally, it is perhaps significant that Mavis, the one informant who uses /ɑ:/ in this context, worked for many years outside the village, as a shop assistant in Canterbury.

<sup>16</sup> According to Lass (2000: 88–90), the first clear description of the phenomenon dates from 1644.

<sup>17</sup> Wells (1982: 362) associates the [wɒn] pronunciation with the major cities of the north Midlands, Lancashire and south Yorkshire, and notes that the /ɒ/ vowel in other items including *among*, *once* and *nothing* may be heard in “a somewhat more restricted area” (ibid.) of northern England which he does not specify.

**Table 3:** Development of Middle English /o:, u/ in accents with FOOT-STRUT split (Wells 1982: 199).

	<i>mood</i>	<i>blood</i>	<i>good</i>	<i>cut</i>	<i>put</i>
Middle English	o:	o:	o:	u	u
Great Vowel Shift	u:	u:	u:	—	—
Early Shortening	—	u	—	—	—
(Quality adjustment)	—	ʊ	—	ʊ	ʊ
FOOT-STRUT split	—	ɤ	—	ɤ	ʊ
Later Shortening	—	—	ʊ	—	—
(Quality adjustment)	—	ʌ	—	ʌ	—
Output	u:	ʌ	ʊ	ʌ	ʊ

**Table 4:** Development of Middle English /o:, u/ in accents without FOOT-STRUT split (Wells 1982: 199).

	<i>mood</i>	<i>blood</i>	<i>good</i>	<i>cut</i>	<i>put</i>
Middle English	o:	o:	o:	u	u
Great Vowel Shift	u:	u:	u:	—	—
Early Shortening	—	u	—	—	—
(Quality adjustment)	—	ʊ	—	ʊ	ʊ
Later Shortening	—	—	ʊ	—	—
Output	u:	ʊ	ʊ	ʌ	ʊ

For Wells’ BLOOD and CUT subsets, where northern and southern English realizations differ, both [ʌ] and [ʊ] are used, but it is a central vowel around [ə] which is by far the most common form. Incidence of [ʊ] in the CUT subset is sporadic but more common among the male speakers, who use relatively little [ʌ]; the oldest male informant, Bill, uses [ʊ] several times (e.g. in *gunpowder*, *stuck*) when describing an accident underground, but hardly at all elsewhere in his interview. The female informants, by contrast, generally have very limited [ʊ] and vary between [ə] and [ʌ] for the CUT subset; the oldest female informant, Elspeth, born in Derbyshire but raised in Aylesham from the age of ten, has *sometimes* [ʊ] but *somebody* [ə].

To summarize, the data would seem to indicate that /ʊ/ for the CUT and BLOOD subsets and /ɒ/ in a restricted lexical set including *one*, are both present but vestigial in Aylesham; for these two sets speakers generally use central /ə/ rather than southern English /ʌ/, while the MOOD, PUT and GOOD subsets have respectively /u:/, /ʊ/ and /ʊ/ as in south-eastern English and RP. In Wells’ (1982: 353) terms, traditional Ayleshamers seem to have settled on the second of two intermediate stages between RP and ‘broad’ northern accents which have [ʊ] consistently

	STRUT	FOOT	
Broad	[ʊ]	[ʊ]	One phoneme, /ʊ/
Intermediate	[ə ~ ʌ]	[ə ~ ʌ]	One phoneme; realization modified
	[ə ~ ʌ]	[ʊ]	Two phonemes; incidence be erratic
may			
RP	[ʌ]	[ʊ]	Two phonemes, /ʌ/ vs. /ʊ/

**Figure 1:** FOOT-STRUT in the north of England (after Wells 1982: 353; (Fig. 187)).

for both STRUT and FOOT, characterized by erratic use of the six-term short vowel system of southern British English and consistent use of [ʊ] in the FOOT set.

### Other Aylesham vowels

#### NURSE

The NURSE vowel in RP is described by Wells (1982: 137) as a “relatively long unrounded mid central vocoid, [ə:]” ([ɜ:] for Trudgill 2004: 142). It arises from the merger of three distinct Middle English short vowels /ɪr/, /ɛr/ and /ʊr/ to /ər/ from the sixteenth century (Trudgill 2004: 142), followed by Pre-R lengthening and finally R dropping which left a single phoneme /ɜ:/ in England but not in Scotland, where R dropping has not taken place and the three vowels /ɪr/ (GIRL), /ɛr/ (HERD) and /ʊr/ (NURSE) remain distinct. Informants merge these three sets, and all except Jane, who has an RP-like variant, use rounded and fronted variants around [œ:- ʊ:].

#### SQUARE

As in the case of NURSE, SQUARE originates from a Middle English vowel, in this case /a:/, /ɛ:/ or /ai/, in the environment of a following /r/ which has been lost in RP and southern English accents. It is described by Wells (1982: 156) as a centring diphthong which starts with a half-open unrounded vowel and moves to a mid-central vowel around schwa, i.e. [ɛə]. Wells notes (1982: 157) that the RP /ɛə/ vowel “often involves very little diphthongal movement”, particularly in word-final position where it has a rather more open second element. The informants mostly have a raised monophthongal realization around [ɛ:- [e:]].

#### GOAT

The GOAT vowel in RP derives from Middle English /ɔ:/ (*toe, sole, nose*) or /ɔu/ (*tow, soul, knows*), which came together as [o:] in the seventeenth Century, and later diphthongized to [ou] and more recently [əʊ]. The two sets are also merged in Aylesham, and all informants used exclusively diphthongal variants, with the

exception of Bill who uses [ɔ̞] for the first vowel in *snowstorm* on two occasions. These were generally close or identical to RP [əʊ] for female informants, but male informants mostly had a backed and lowered first element, around [ʌʊ]–[ɔ̞ʊ]; this was slightly raised in Paul’s case, to around [oʊ] in most tokens.

### 5.3 Grammar and lexicon

In the context of the perceived ‘northernness’ of Aylesham English, mention should be made of a morphological feature, definite article reduction (DAR), which is particularly associated with Yorkshire and Lancashire (and also used in the north Midlands: see Beal 2010: 48). DAR involves reduction of the definite article *the* to zero or more commonly, as in Aylesham, a glottal stop (often rendered orthographically by a *t*’, as stereotypically in *trouble up at t’mill*). Like unsplit FOOT-STRUT, this appears to be vestigial in Aylesham, with only two male informants using it at all in the pilot study (another informant in his 70s used it on two occasions in informal conversation with the researcher). The oldest informant, Bill, reduces on several occasions when describing a pithead accident in which he was involved. For example:<sup>18</sup>

*We were fast down t’pit  
On t’pit bottom*

Past tense paradigm levelling of the verb ‘to be’ (e.g. “when all the strikes was on”) was common, but there was little evidence to suggest that the Northern Subject Rule (Britain 2007: 86) is applied in Aylesham. The NSR is a non-standard agreement pattern common in northern English and Scots dialects in which present tense verbs take the -s suffix unless directly adjacent to a subject pronoun (e.g. *they know* but *the men knows*, *they sing and dances*). It is also suggested locally that Ayleshamers follow the ‘northern’ pattern of auxiliary rather than negative contraction (*I’ve not* rather than *I haven’t*: see Hughes & Trudgill 1996: 15), but again there was no strong evidence of this in the data.

There were likewise relatively few examples of dialectal vocabulary in the interviews, and the few that did occur were generally offered by informants as

<sup>18</sup> It is unlikely to be coincidental that Bill’s sporadic uses of this and two other vestigial variants alluded to above, namely [ʊ] in the STRUT set and monophthongal [ɔ̞] in *snowstorm* all occur while he is recounting the story of an accident underground in which he was involved. In similar vein, Gordon et al (2004: 182; quoted by Trudgill 2004: 157–58) observe similar apparently topic-related use of a vestigial feature, namely rhoticity, in early New Zealand English in lexical items associated with ‘old-time activities’, such as *faming* and *mining*.

examples of local speech, rather than used spontaneously: these included *snap* (food), and *jitty* (alleyway), both of which are well known outside Aylesham and have acquired a status akin to stereotypes. The origin of both appears to be the East Midlands (Derbyshire/Nottinghamshire). Recalling his childhood, Bill evoked games of *knocky ido* – a prank in which children knock at a front door but run away before it is answered: the origin of this term appears to be north-eastern, and the game generally goes under a different name in the south-east; his use of the word *fast* [fast] in the sense of ‘stuck’ (“we were fast down t’pit”) is also unusual in modern south-eastern English, where *stuck fast* is more commonly used.

One might venture to suggest that the widespread perception in Kent that Aylesham speech is ‘northern’ stems almost as much from what the villagers do *not* do as from what they do. Their consistent use of the TRAP vowel in the BATH lexical set is unambiguously northern, as is the sporadic use of DAR, but it is equally likely that Ayleshamers are marked out locally for consistent non-use of typically south-eastern features such as TH fronting or L vocalization, and the extension of schwa-like variants (rather than /ʌ/) to strong (i.e. stressed) members of the STRUT set as well as weak items where southern English speakers may also use them. The reasons why these forms have emerged in Aylesham are explored in Section 6, after a brief review of findings from two comparable types of contact situation which might serve as models for new dialect formation in Aylesham.

## 6 New dialect formation in colonial and new town settings

This chapter opened with a simple question: to what extent does the local perception of a focused and distinct Aylesham dialect reflect the reality of variation within the village? It was clear from the previous section that, irrespective of their heritage, Ayleshamers use a number of local forms which diverge significantly from supralocal south-eastern varieties. One possibility which can be ruled out is that these supposedly ‘Aylesham’ forms are merely vestigial forms retained by descendants of the different settler groups and do not form part of a shared new dialect. Firstly, the pilot study evidence suggested a high degree of focusing, with a single local form emerging in most cases to compete with a supralocal south-eastern variant. This local variant used was, moreover, often different from the heritage form which might have been expected: Bill, the sole informant of purely Kentish heritage, uses the most forms normally associated with northern England; another informant (not interviewed), who showed evidence of DAR, was

brought to Aylesham from South Wales at a very young age, and has no northern English connections. By far the most likely source of these divergent forms is contact between the input dialects of the various newcomers who settled in Aylesham, for the most part, between 1927 and 1935. This raises some important questions: which forms emerged from the original dialect mix and which were lost in the focusing process, and secondly, was this outcome was predictable, given what is known about settlement in the east Kent coalfield? Since koinéization is associated with situations in which a sudden and intense migration event takes place, existing models of new dialect formation are derived primarily from colonial and new town settings. As will become clear below, Aylesham shares some features of both, but corresponds to neither model exactly.

The early migrants to Kent travelled far in search of a new life, cutting ties with home in order to live and work alongside people of very different cultures from their own in an alien environment. They thus bear comparison to the settlers in colonial settings from whose speech the new dialects of New Zealand (Trudgill 2004; Gordon et al 2004); the Falkland Islands (Britain & Sudbury 2010), or Tristan Da Cunha (Schreier 2010) are derived. An important difference in this case, however, is that they came to a place where English (albeit of an unfamiliar kind) was already spoken: Aylesham is not a *tabula rasa* situation of the kind described by Trudgill (2004) for New Zealand. But although created *ab initio* in response to a specific housing need, Aylesham does not quite fit the model of the twentieth-century 'new town', as exemplified by Milton Keynes (Kerswill & Williams 2000 & 2005) or Høyanger (Omdal 1977), either.<sup>19</sup> Aside from the fact that it never grew into a fully-fledged town as originally planned, the village is unusual in that it did not draw its settler population largely from its immediate hinterland or, at least, from its own region.<sup>20</sup> To what extent, then, might either colonial or new town settings provide a model for koinéization in Aylesham, and

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Kerswill & Williams (2005: 1023):

The establishment of new towns in the twentieth century in many parts of the world is a test-bed of koineisation, the type of language change that takes place when speakers of different, but mutually intelligible language varieties come together, and which may lead to *new-dialect* or *koiné* formation.

<sup>20</sup> Aylesham bears comparison in this respect with Corby (see Dyer 2002), a Northamptonshire town settled in part by Scots recruited to work in the local steel industry, the key difference being that migrants to Corby came predominantly from broadly the same place, i.e. Glasgow and its environs in the first wave (1933–44), with some later migration from Aberdeen and Peterhead after 1945. According to Dyer (2002: 101) Scots accounted for 30% of the Corby population by 1971, while in Aylesham a large majority of the population is of migrant heritage.

what light can internal migrant communities like Aylesham shed on our understanding of new dialect formation more generally?

Trudgill's bold claim, as signalled in the title of his 2004 work on New Zealand English, is that the outcomes of koinéization in colonial situations are largely predictable given reliable information about the time of settlement, and the proportions of different dialect speakers in the original input mix. Using evidence from the ONZE (Origins of New Zealand English) corpus, Trudgill suggests that focusing of the original dialect mix, reconstructed on the basis of available information on variation in English at the time of migration, follows a predictable route over three generations. At Stage 1, a heterogeneous group of migrants come together in their new environment (and in the case of the first New Zealand settlers, on the long sea journey to their new home). At this stage, speakers whose speech habits are largely settled accommodate to each other only to a limited degree: a few 'marked' or salient features, particularly those likely to generate misunderstanding or confusion by virtue of being rare, are levelled out. At Stage 2, the children of those settlers are faced with a highly heterogeneous set of input dialects, and in the absence of a common peer-group dialect to which to accommodate, they may choose from a vast array of competing variants and use them in a striking range of combinations (Trudgill 2004: 108):

The variability that we witness is certainly, rather, the result of children selecting at will from a kind of supermarket, as it were, of vocalic and consonantal variants with which they were surrounded. We have to say, then, that what occurred was a form of variable acquisition, not accommodation.

While Stage 2 sees the levelling out of highly marked forms from the dialect mix, reduction is relatively limited and the speech of this generation is characterized by a very high degree of inter- and intra-speaker variability. It is only at Stage 3, Trudgill argues, that one witnesses the emergence of a stable, focused new dialect in the third generation, and the variants which generally prevail correspond broadly to those which were most widely used in the original settler mix (see Trudgill 2004: 114): "The final shape of New Zealand English is the result of a levelling process which, for the most part, consisted of the loss of demographically minority forms".

In the new city of Milton Keynes, however, Kerswill & Williams (2000: 110) argue that focusing is already evident to a significant degree in the second generation, a fact which they ascribe to the similarity of the input dialects, a high proportion of children in the early years of settlement and finally the ease with which these children were able to form social networks in which new norms could be forged. In Høyanger (Omdal 1977), and the seventeenth-century Fens

(Britain 1997), by contrast, the distance between input dialects was significant and social barriers of different kinds obstructed the formation of child peer groups. Milton Keynes is, moreover, unusual in that it lacks the usual correlation between class and social network (observable for example in the older, established city of Reading, which provided a control site). Working-class networks are usually dense and multiplex, because the least powerful have greatest need of solidarity and mutual support mechanisms for survival, but in Milton Keynes they were loose-knit and largely uniplex. Kerswill and Williams (2000) found that working-class Milton Keynesians often had few local connections, maintaining links with family and friends outside of the city, and that this was not infrequently a lifestyle choice. In respect of phonology (but not grammar), the behaviour of working-class informants in Milton Keynes appeared to mirror that of middle-class speakers more generally, in that their uniplex networks seemed to promote rapid change in the direction of highly levelled, non-local forms, often a compromise between London English and RP. The contrast with Aylesham, where residents have historically had few links outside the village and very strong networks within it, is particularly striking in this regard.

## 7 The making of a koiné

Attempting to determine how and why some forms rather than others emerged from the reduction process has been likened by more than one commentator (Trudgill 2004; Britain 2012) to cake-baking in reverse, in that one starts with the finished product and has to work backwards to establish the ‘ingredients’ and time of ‘baking’. What, then, is known about the ingredients which first entered the mix in Aylesham? Because pre-war Aylesham was characterized by a high degree of demographic instability, any available statistical data must be treated with caution. But it can safely be assumed that peak migration to the village occurred in the first ten years of its existence (1927–37), and that the vast majority of settlers came from other UK coalfields, with only a small indigenous Kentish contribution. It is also highly unlikely that any ethnic group ever formed a majority in the village: while for reasons identified above it is quite possible that Thomas’ figure of 26% underestimates the proportion of Welsh migrants in Aylesham by 1936, there is no evidence to suggest that a more accurate figure would be as high as 50%, or even close to that level. Thomas’ low figure of 4% for the South West may even be an over-estimate: west country miners from Somerset in particular are believed to have been particularly



numerous at Tilmanstone rather than Snowdown; his estimates for the North West and Scotland (8% each) both suggest a small but significant presence, with a slightly higher figure for the Midlands (in this case Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire for the most part: 13%) and a very high figure for the North East (40%), which includes Northumberland, County Durham and Yorkshire (see Table 1 above).

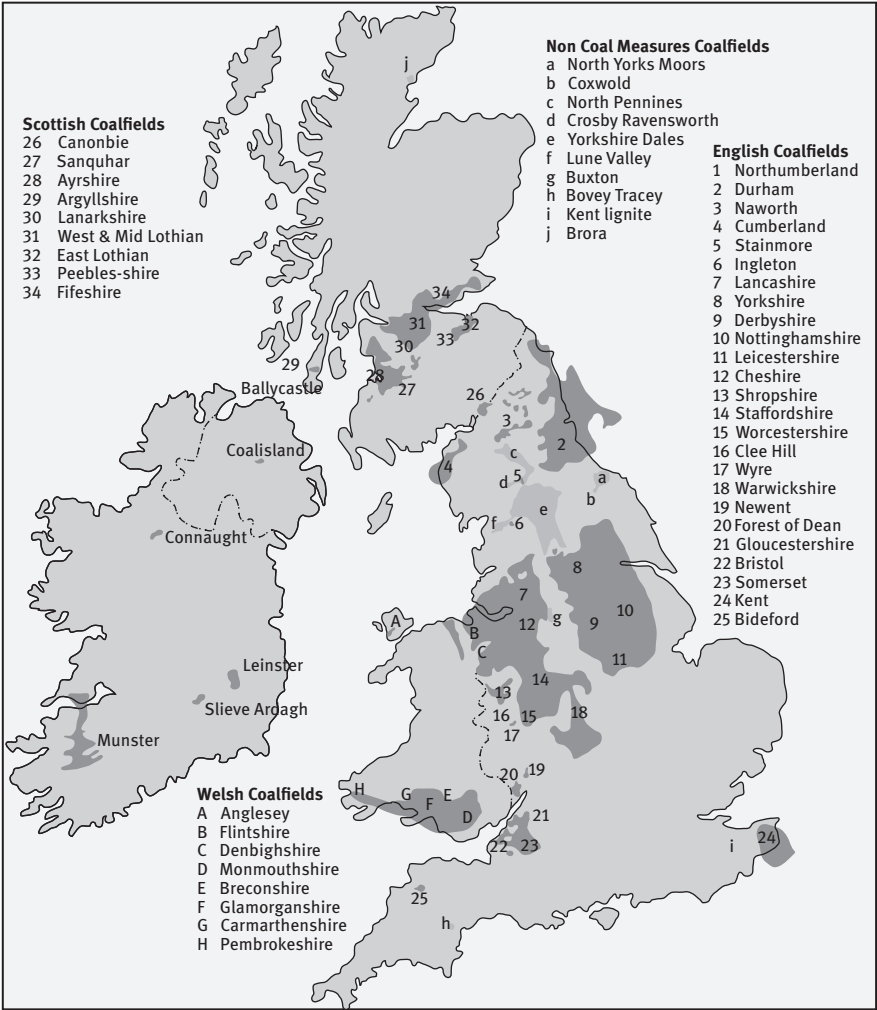
A number of sources, including Hughes and Trudgill (1996), Wells (1982), and Trudgill (2004) will be used to establish which variants were most likely to have been brought to Aylesham by these different migrant groups, but account must also be taken of the rural Kentish forms that the newcomers probably encountered on arrival, for which the *Survey of English Dialects* (SED; Orton et al 1962–71) provides useful data. The SED monitored 7 sites in Kent, of which Staple (Site 3) and Denton (Site 5) in the east, both approximately 4 miles from Aylesham, and the two central sites (7 Appledore and 4 Warren Street), are of particular interest. For the other coalfield areas, the SED, which focused on rural villages, should be used with caution as allowance must be made for a degree of local dialect mixing having already taken place in each pit village.<sup>21</sup> Writing on pit life in County Durham, Douglass (1973: 29) observes: “Pit talk in Durham is not a uniform language; it has accents and dialects of its own. Moving from one village to another can involve the pitman in real difficulties of communication”.

## 7.1 Consonants

It was noted above that Ayleshamers’ consonant system corresponds to that of RP, and in particular that Aylesham speech is non-rhotic. Maps 1 and 2 illustrate why this was always likely to be the case: only the Scottish coalfields, and smaller fields in the south west fall squarely into the traditionally rhotic areas, and only a relatively small percentage of workers (8% and 4% respectively) are understood to have come from these regions. Even if one assumes that all of the arrivals from the north-west were rhotic Lancastrians, which seems unlikely, the non-prevocalic /r/ users would have been heavily outnumbered. The Scottish

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<sup>21</sup> On this point see Lawson (1944: 56–57), quoted by Douglass (1973: 5), who cites Boldon Colliery, Co. Durham as a ‘social melting pot owing to the rapid development of the coalfield during the nineteenth century ... there was a combination of Lancashire, Cumberland, Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Cornish, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Northumbrian and Durham accents, dialects and languages’.



**Map 1:** Coalfields in UK and Ireland.  
(Source: Northern Mine Research Society, <http://nmrs.org.uk/mines/coal/index.html>; accessed 20.2.2016).

alveolar trill [r] and the Northumbrian uvular approximant [Ɂ], as minority variants in prevocalic position, would probably have been levelled out at an early stage. The same appears to have been true of the tapped [ɾ] used by some Scots, northern English and South Walian speakers (see Hughes & Trudgill 1996: 61). Although described by Wells (1982: 368) as “a rival to the usual post-alveolar approximant, [ɹ]” it appears to be phonetically restricted to a few environments,



**Map 2:** Rhoticity in England.  
(Source: Trudgill 1999: 27; Map 5).

and as a minority variant with a complex distribution, it would have lost out in terms of both levelling and simplification as the input dialect mix reduced.

For /l/, which shows the clear/dark allophonic distribution of RP, the outcome seems less predictable, given that South Walian and Tyneside accents generally have clear [l] in all positions (Wells 1982: 374 & 390), and that speakers of both varieties would have been well represented in Aylesham in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, it is unlikely that a majority of speakers in the input dialect mix lacked the clear/dark allophonic distinction. Even if as many as half of Thomas' figure of 40% for the North East contribution to the Kent migrant mix were clear [l] users, this figure, when combined with the estimate for Wales

<sup>22</sup> Wells (1982: 370) also notes: "Northern pronunciation often lacks the sharp clear/dark allophony found in the south and RP."

(25%) would still constitute a minority, albeit a sizeable one, even before any influence of local southern English allophony (for example, from the small but unquantified Kentish minority in Aylesham) is allowed for. Clear [l] in non-prevocalic position appears to have been levelled out surprisingly quickly: all the second-generation informants of Welsh heritage use dark [ɫ] consistently. In both these cases, an RP-like form appears to have been selected as the majority variant. In the cases of H dropping and the use of alveolar [n] for /ŋ/ in the *-ing* suffix, however, the variant most frequently heard in Aylesham is a low-status but regionally unmarked form. Trudgill (2004: 74) notes that “Most local accents of English and Welsh English currently demonstrate H dropping”,<sup>23</sup> so its prominence in Aylesham speech is hardly surprising. Less expected is the relative lack of ɾ glottalling, which occurred sporadically in word-final and particularly pre-consonantal position, but only rarely in intervocalic context. As a widely attested form in the south-east, one might expect ɾ glottalling to be more common in Aylesham: indeed, Wells (1982: 261) writes that syllable-final ɾ glottalling “must have spread very fast in the course of the present century”. Trudgill (2004: 81) suggests that this feature is largely absent outside London in SED data, so it can reasonably be assumed not to have been a common variant among migrants to Aylesham. It is also reasonable to suppose that its widespread presence in the south-east and beyond is largely attributable to diffusion and pressure from the capital. That its penetration in Aylesham is so limited attests to the relative lack of weak ties between an isolated community and its hinterland.

## 7.2 Vowels

### TRAP-BATH

It will be recalled that all informants except Mavis had northern short /a/ in the BATH set, and that this appears to be a strong indicator even among younger Ayleshamers. The most obvious explanation for the absence of the TRAP-BATH split in Aylesham would seem to be that virtually none of the input dialects had it. Trudgill (2004: 59) describes the southern long /ɑ:/ vowel as a ‘relatively

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<sup>23</sup> Trudgill (2004: 72–77) interprets Ellis’ (1889) data and the SED evidence as showing parts of Kent furthest from London (see Map 9, p. 75) as areas of /h/ retention, but SED evidence for east Kent is in fact rather mixed: deletion occurs in all four sites for *hand*, *hair*, *hay*, and *heat* but informants in three of the four sites have /h/ in *hot*, and there is some /h/ retention attested for *hammer* and *home*.

new addition to the phoneme inventory of English', which resulted from a number of changes which took place in the south-east (see Wells 1982: 206), but not the north of England, the south west or Scotland, between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.

The TRAP vowel in Aylesham is generally realized as [a]: raising to [æ], or [ɛ] is widely attested in the Kent SED data, though as one might expect this is more common at the sites closer to London than in Staple or Denton. There was, however, no evidence of raising at all in Aylesham.

### START and PALM

Ayleshamers generally have back [ɑ:] for the PALM and START sets, though Bob consistently uses [a:] in this context. That there is not more evidence of [a:] in these two lexical sets is perhaps surprising, given that Welsh English has a length distinction *pat-part* /a/-/a:/, and that some northern English varieties similarly have front /a:/ in the PALM and START sets. North-eastern varieties have back [ɑ:] in the START set (see Wells 1982: 375) and some Scots speakers have short back [ɑ] in the PALM set, providing some counterbalance; Wells also suggests that some northern and midland varieties in particular (e.g. Birmingham) have [ɑ:], but for the midland counties most relevant to Aylesham, i.e. Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, SED evidence at least suggests fairly consistent use of [a:] in the START and PALM sets. It seems likely that informants would have heard both front and back variants in these sets as children, but it is far from clear why the back variant appears to have won out so convincingly. SED evidence suggests that backing of the /a:/ in the BATH set was largely complete in east Kent by the late 1950s, with some residual rhoticity in items such as *arm*, *bars* (*Aunt* in Denton however is [ænt]). One might speculate that the prevailing south-eastern form won out in the absence of a clear majority form in the input mix, but the evidence at this stage is not conclusive.

### FOOT-STRUT

Like its BATH-TRAP counterpart, the FOOT-STRUT split is associated with southern England, and has not happened in the dialects of northern England which the first Aylesham settlers would have spoken. Scottish English varieties however have the split, and while Welsh English lacks the phoneme /ʌ/ it does distinguish the FOOT set, which has /ʊ/, from the STRUT set, which has /ə/, realized, according to Wells (1982: 380), as [ə ~ ʌ̃]. Second-generation Ayleshamers were therefore confronted with at least three systems: (i) unsplit FOOT-STRUT (ii) split FOOT-STRUT, with /ə/ in the STRUT set and (iii) split FOOT-STRUT, with /ʌ/ in the STRUT set. Though traces of all three systems were evident in the pilot study data, the intermediate system (ii) associated with Welsh English appears to have won out, with schwa-like variants rather than southern English /ʌ/ most common in the

STRUT set. This system broadly corresponds to that of Wells' (1982: 352) "northern near RP", as mentioned above, but a resolutely proletarian working-class community seems an unlikely source for a system which Wells, at least, seems to associate with aspirations to upward social mobility. Nor is it obvious how this system would have prevailed on numerical grounds in the early years of settlement: Thomas' estimates of proportions of settlers from the North East (40%), North West (8%) and Midlands (13%), all of whom might normally be expected to have system (i), add up to a total of 61% and apparently a clear majority for unsplit FOOT-STRUT. This 'raw' figure of 61% for system (i), however, is misleading, for a number of reasons. Thomas' figures do not take into account a small but non-negligible percentage of Kentish mineworkers; younger Ayleshamers would also have encountered some children from neighbouring villages such as Adisham, who also attended Aylesham Secondary School. Thomas' figure of 25% for south Wales may also, as was noted above, be an underestimate. It is also likely that some first-generation northern migrants had already accommodated to system (ii), which did not require acquisition of the new phoneme /ʌ/, at Stage 1. The safest conclusion that can be drawn is that Aylesham children encountered a fairly even divide between the merged system (i) on the one hand and split systems (ii) and (iii) on the other. In such circumstances, system (ii) would have represented a compromise between the 'northern' and 'southern' systems and might have been targeted accordingly as a 'strategy of neutrality' (see Maehlum 1992). A further factor favouring a compromise strategy is the likely absence of a clear model at the time in Kentish English, which, unusually for southern England, appears still to have been in transition to a full split between the two vowels. SED reports for central and east Kent suggest that the FOOT-STRUT split, believed to have begun in the early seventeenth century, was still far from complete in east Kent by the late 1950s, as is evident from the following data, which show considerable variation between /ʌ/, /ʊ/ and /ɒ/:

**Table 5:** The FOOT-STRUT in central and east Kent (SED).

	3. Staple	5. Denton	7. Appledore	4. Warren Street
ONE	ɒ	ɒ	ɒ/ʊ	ɒ
BROTHER	ɒ	ʌ	ʌ/ʊ	ʊ
BUMP	ɒ	ʊ	ʌ	ʊ
DOZEN	ɒ	ɒ	ʊ	ʌ
JUMP	ʌ	ʌ	ʊ	ʊ
OVEN	ɒ	ɒ	ʌ	ɒ
OTHER	ɒ	ɒ/ʌ	ʌ/ʊ	ʌ

While the /ʊ/ and /ʊ/ forms were clearly recessive by the 1950s, it is reasonable to assume that they were more common a generation earlier, when migration to east Kent was at its peak. In so far as unsplit BATH-TRAP system is clearly more robust in Aylesham than unsplit FOOT-STRUT, findings from Aylesham seem to be consistent with Wells' (1982: 354) observation that:

There are many educated northerners who would not be caught dead doing something so vulgar as to pronounce STRUT words with [ʊ], but who would feel it to be a denial of their identity as northerners to say BATH words with anything other than short [a].

Ayleshamers do not, however, self-identify as 'northerners', and one should in any case, as Trudgill points out (2004: 148–53) be cautious about applying notions of 'identity' or 'prestige' to a dialect formation process which involves children making sense of a dialect mix and creating a new local norm for themselves. I return to this point below.

### **SQUARE and NURSE**

These two vowels are merged in some of the northern varieties which would probably have contributed to the input dialect mix, but are separated in Aylesham. According to Wells (1982: 155–57), monophthongal realizations of the SQUARE vowel, realized [ɛə] in RP, are not uncommon in English and Welsh accents; Scottish English varieties are rhotic and have /er/ or /ɛr/ in this context. For the areas relevant to the Kent coalfield, Wells suggests a merger of the NURSE and SQUARE vowels around [ɜ:] in south Lancashire but generally monophthongal realizations around [ɛ:] in the north and Midlands, and in Wales. That the SQUARE vowel should be a long monophthong in Aylesham is therefore unsurprising, but it is far from clear why the most common form is nearer to half-close [e:] than to [ɛ:]. There would appear to be two possible explanations. One possibility is simply that the vowel raised from [ɛ:] sometime after settlement. This, however, seems unlikely, given that the second-generation speakers already have mostly [e:] rather than [ɛ:]. A second, more plausible interpretation of the data is that the raised vowel was the most common in the input mix. It can be assumed that Lancastrians with the merged NURSE-SQUARE [ɜ:] pronunciation were in a small minority, and that this form did not survive long. But north-eastern speakers may well have had a raised vowel here (Wells 1982: 374 suggests [ɛ̝]), and Scots a half-close [e] in pre-rhotic position. His description of Welsh English suggests that the SQUARE vowel is [ɛ:], but Wells (1982: 383) notes that the Welsh language has /e:/ but not /ɛ:/, adding: "Long /ɛ:/ and /ɔ:/ must have been easy for Welsh speakers confronted with learning English to add to the Welsh system, since they were merely a matter of adding length to the already known qualities of short /ɛ, ɔ/." While any conclusions at this stage must be tentative, Welsh is known

to have been strong, if already in decline, in south Wales in the 1920s,<sup>24</sup> and it is likely that many Welsh migrants to Aylesham were still acquiring the new system and assimilating the SQUARE vowel to the more familiar /e:/ of their first language. The raised vowel used by Scots, Welsh and north-east English speakers would in those circumstances have been the dominant variant, and adopted accordingly.

Like its SQUARE counterpart, the NURSE vowel is restricted to non-rhotic accents, and results from the merger to /əɪ/ and later opening to /ɜɪ/ of three Middle English vowel phonemes /ɪɪ/, /ɛɪ/ and /ʊɪ/ in contexts where /ɪ/ was non-prevocalic (see Trudgill 2004: 142); this vowel lengthened to /ɜ:/ after R dropping. This merger did not take place in Scotland, where the three vowels are maintained in *bird*, *herd* and *curd*, but they are merged in Aylesham, where the NURSE vowel has a fronted and rounded quality. Citing Orton, Sanderson & Widdowson (1978), Trudgill (2004: 142) notes that the RP [ɜ:] realization is relatively new and not especially common in traditional dialects of the 1950s and 1960s: the areas which consistently have it (e.g. Cheshire, Essex, Huntingdonshire) are not those from which migration to Kent occurred in significant numbers. Wells suggests considerable variability for this vowel, the most relevant variants for Aylesham being back rounded [ɔ:] on Tyneside, possibly [ɛ:] from pits around Merseyside (e.g. St. Helens) and [œ:] (or [ø:]) in Welsh and some Lancashire English accents. Agreement between these latter two input varieties, plus perhaps some [ø:] from what Wells (1982: 375) describes as a “less broad Newcastle accent”, probably offers the best explanation for the prevalence of front rounded realizations in Aylesham. For both the SQUARE and NURSE vowels, SED data for east and central Kent suggest an RP-like vowel with residual rhoticity.

### GOAT

What is perhaps surprising about the GOAT vowel in Aylesham is its clearly diphthongal quality, in contrast to the monophthongal variants used in many of the input varieties. Diphthonging is taken by Trudgill (2004: 55) to be a nineteenth-century south-eastern innovation, which would have failed to affect Scots and some conservative northern English working-class accents at the time of migration to Kent. Wells (1982: 146) notes:

This variable is particularly variable both regionally and socially, and may be found in a variety of monophthongal and diphthongal qualities ranging from [o:] to [eɪ], [əʊ] and [ʊɔ].

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<sup>24</sup> 1921 Census returns for Welsh speakers in the mining town of Merthyr Tydfil, for example, give a figure of 41.8% (James 1927: 82).



But while monophthongal realizations such as [o:] (Wales/Lancashire); [ɔ:] (Yorkshire); [ø:] or [θ:] (Northumberland/Durham) were no doubt part of the input dialect mix, the SED and other sources suggest a very wide range of diphthongs was likely to have been used too. A far from exhaustive list of the possibilities would include: [ɪə] (Lancashire); [ɪa] (Yorkshire); [ʊə] (Tyneside and parts of Yorkshire); [ɔə] (Nottinghamshire); [ɔʊ] (Leicestershire). The variant mostly used by male informants, though rarely by female ones, is closer to [ʌʊ] or [ʊʊ]. Hughes and Trudgill (1996: 112) summarize the variation affecting the GOAT and FACE vowels in the following way:

As has been seen, /ei/ and /ou/ are wide diphthongs in the south of England, narrow diphthongs further north, and monophthongs in northern Lancashire and Yorkshire.

Second-generation Ayleshamers would have encountered many different pronunciations, with narrow diphthongs –which for GOAT means diphthongs with backed first and final elements – associated predominantly with the Midlands, Lancashire, and south Yorkshire contrasting with monophthongs used by migrants from further north and by South Walians. It is highly unlikely that any single variant was a majority pronunciation, though the narrow north midland diphthongs which appear to have won out are likely to have been widely used and perceptually similar. It is not insignificant here that SED data for rural east Kent generally also record diphthongs with a low backed first element and a high backed final element. Table 6 below gives the data from the four central and east Kent sites for the lexical items LOAF, OAK and SNOW:

**Table 6:** The GOAT vowel in east Kent (SED).

	3. Staple	5. Denton	4. Warren Street	7. Appledore
LOAF	ɒʊ	ʊʊ	ɒʊ	ɔʊ
OAK	ɒʊ	ɒʊ	ɒʊ	ɔʊ
SNOW	ɒʊ	ɒɔ	ɒʊ	ɔʊ

Given such an array of alternatives, and with no clear target, selection of local Kentish forms, which were similar to variants already used by some members of the community, might again have represented a ‘strategy of neutrality’, of the kind we saw above for FOOT-STRUT.

## 8 Conclusions and questions for further research

While any conclusions drawn from a pilot study must necessarily be tentative, a number of interesting findings do emerge. Firstly, while Aylesham is certainly not

New Zealand, the deterministic model of new dialect formation which Trudgill offers for colonial settings appears thus far to hold good in east Kent – or at least, no compelling counterevidence has yet been found to the claim that it is majority variants from the input dialect mix, or ‘compromise’ variants where more than two forms are strongly represented in the mix, which are most likely to prevail in the new variety. These findings also appear to echo a widely observed pattern in which consonants are seen to level to a greater extent than vowels: all the distinctive features of Aylesham speech were vocalic, in spite of what must have been considerable variation in the input consonant mix.

Particularly noteworthy was the extent of focusing which seems evident even among second-generation speakers: generally intraspeaker variation is between a single local and an RP-like south-eastern variant, and while some use of alternative variants was observed – Alan for example has [y(ə)] before /l/ in coda position e.g. in *school*, while Bob generally has [a:] rather than [ɑ:] in the START set – there appears to be nothing resembling the wide intraspeaker variability demonstrated by Trudgill’s informant Mr. Riddle (2004: 105–106) and it was noteworthy, for example, that monophthongal variants of RP diphthongs such as PRICE, GOAT, and FACE, which must played a significant part in the input dialect mix, all seem to have been levelled out in Aylesham. The best explanation for what appears to be quite rapid focusing is the very different nature of social networks in Aylesham in comparison with both New Zealand and Milton Keynes, where both Trudgill (2004: 162) and Kerswill & Williams (2005) respectively stress the loose and uniplex nature of ties in the new setting. In Aylesham, by contrast, links outside the village in a region generally perceived to be hostile were limited and a close-knit proletarian community, which appears to have become settled at about the time most of the pilot study informants were children, acted as a very strong focusing mechanism for a local norm, as in Belfast (see Milroy 1987). That men, involved in a traditional primary industry in which solidarity is not just promoted but demanded, were more subject to the latter than women is reflected in their more focused vernacular: it was notable for example that female informants generally have a more RP-like variant of the GOAT vowel than men. This is almost certainly a reflection of the historical tendency of women to have more ties outside the village than men, for example through seasonal agricultural work. Mavis, who spent many years working in a Canterbury department store, has the fewest local Aylesham features in spite of being one of the oldest informants. The strength of local networks in Aylesham and the village’s isolation likewise offer the best explanations for the relative failure of more recent supralocal innovations to take hold: there was almost no evidence of L vocalization or TH fronting, and only very limited T glottalling in intervocalic position.

I noted above that, unlike New Zealand settlers, migrants to Aylesham encountered an indigenous variety of English on arrival. What remains unclear at this stage, and a question which has thus far been left open, is the weight of influence of that variety in the input mix. On the one hand, Kentish dialect speakers formed a small minority in Aylesham, and it is well documented that relations between a relatively isolated industrial village and its rural surroundings have been difficult, and not infrequently hostile. On the other, Kentish varieties would have been heard regularly in encounters with outsiders, and it is known also that some children from surrounding villages were schooled alongside Ayleshamers at Aylesham Secondary School. Some Aylesham women in particular would also have had weak ties with local agricultural workers through seasonal employment at harvest time. At this stage one can suggest tentatively that indigenous dialect forms could only prevail in Aylesham either in cases where local norms broadly agreed with dominant forms in the mix, or where variability (e.g. for the GOAT vowel and possibly also for /r/) was so wide that no single variant enjoyed majority status. In such cases, selection of the local form might have represented a strategy of neutrality similar to that adopted in Milton Keynes for the MOUTH vowel (Kerswill & Williams 2000: 89).

Given Ayleshamers' evident pride in their heritage and history, it might seem surprising that the concept of identity has thus far not been invoked at all in attempting to account for the maintenance of some forms at the expense of others in the new dialect. Trudgill (2004: 148–65) and Gordon and Trudgill (2004) are dismissive of any role for social prestige or identity at Stages 2 and 3 of the new dialect formation process, on the grounds that the creation of a new norm is largely the work of children who are (whatever their carers and educators might wish!) generally impervious to such notions and accommodate instead to their peers. Examination of the evidence shows why social factors of this kind are indeed unlikely to be helpful here. The historical isolation and stigmatization of the mining communities might lead one to expect a strategy of divergence, i.e. the adoption of forms which are as different as possible from those used locally in Kent. While this would certainly seem to offer a plausible explanation for the adoption of schwa-like variants – the only ones *not* attested in the Kent SED evidence – for the STRUT lexical set, it seems hard to reconcile with the adoption of variants for the GOAT vowel which seem close to local Kent forms, when many divergent alternatives were available.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> From the limited evidence thus far examined, it appears that the Aylesham PRICE vowel may have followed a similar route.

Trudgill does not, however, rule out prestige factors having an influence at Stage 1, as adult speakers accommodate in a limited way to their new environment, nor after stage 3 when a focused koiné is already established. As was seen above, it is perfectly plausible that newcomers with what I have called system (i) for FOOT-STRUT accommodated in the direction of system (ii), which did not require acquisition of a new vowel. And while it is certainly true, as Trudgill contends, that it makes little sense to claim that migrants to New Zealand designed their speech with a ‘New Zealander’ identity in mind, circumstances in east Kent were different, as we have seen, and further investigation is needed to establish whether local allegiance is a factor in maintaining local forms among Ayleshamers of the fourth generation and beyond. I have suggested elsewhere (Hornsby 2015) that such considerations may explain the evident twentieth-century divergence between Parisian and northern French working-class forms. Certainly anecdotal evidence suggests that the ‘northern’ short /a/ in the BATH set, to which villagers appear particularly sensitive, is not yet about to be levelled out even among the youngest Ayleshamers.

Many questions remain unanswered. Further research is needed from a broader range of speakers across the generational range, including in particular more detailed quantitative and acoustic analysis of Aylesham vowels. More data would, in particular, make possible a more fine-grained analysis of the lexical incidence of the variants involved in the FOOT-STRUT and BATH-TRAP systems, which are known to be variable in different varieties of English. An intriguing possibility which also needs to be explored is whether different outcomes obtained in the smaller villages which served other pits. Here Elvington, which served Tilmanstone colliery, is of particular interest, because it has a comparable proletarian culture to that seen in Aylesham, but lacks the latter’s isolation and its input dialect mix is known to have included significantly greater numbers of migrants from Somerset. Attention has thus far been focused on a small number of ‘traditional’ Ayleshamers, but the speech of younger Ayleshamers from the newer ‘Brookside’ estate, who have no mining connection and largely stand outside the traditional proletarian value system, also merits investigation. A comparison with a well-connected local town, for example Faversham, which lies some 7 miles away, would provide interesting insights into the capacity of an isolated community to resist adoption of supralocal forms.

Aylesham offers a fascinating example of dialect divergence in a region which – from Parish and Shaw’s comments in 1888 to today’s media pronouncements on ‘Estuary English’ – has too often been dismissed as linguistically homogeneous. The last word, in this chapter on south-eastern British English, must therefore go to David Britain (2005: 32): “the good news, therefore, is that diversity continues”.

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